

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1196
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 1786

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, YE
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ALHAMDI ON INTERNAL SITUATION

BEGIN SUMMARY. ON MAY 9 PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI IN DISCUSSING
CURRENT INTERNAL SITUATION ACCUSED AL-AYNI AND ABU LUHUM
GROUP OF BEING BEHIND THE RECENT AL-HAJRI ASSASSINATION AS
WELL AS CURRENT INTERNAL POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES.
AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT IRAQ GIVING FULL SUPPORT TO AL-AYNI
GROUP WITH POSSIBLE PDRY INVOLVEMENT. AL-HAMDI ALSO NOTED
THAT TRIBAL LEADERS LIKE SHAIKH AL-HAMAR NOT TAKING LONG
TERM VIEW OF SITUATION BUT ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO BE USED
BY AL-AYNI GROUP ACTING AS SURROGATES FOR EXTREMIST LEFT.
AL-HAMDI EMPHASIZED THAT HE WILL NOT ALLOW AN "EXPLOSION"
TO TAKE PLACE IN YEMEN AT THIS TIME AND THEREBY PLAY INTO
HANDS OF EXTREMIST LEFT. AL-HAMDI DISCUSSION POINTED UP
CONTINUED CONCERN BY CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OF BEING CAUGHT
BETWEEN EXTREMISTS IN YEMEN AND BEING AS AL-HAMDI PUT IT
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"CRUSHED" BETWEEN THEM AT A TIME WHEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
IS STILL TRYING TO STRENGTHEN ITS MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD
POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING EVENING (MAY 9) TALK WITH PRESIDENT IBRAHIM
AL-HAMDI HE SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ON THE CURRENT INTERNAL
POLITICAL SITUATION WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS TROUBLING

BUT AS UNDER CONTROL. AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT ALL INDICATIONS NOW POINT TO MUHSIN AL-AYNI AND THE ABU LUHUM CLAN AS HAVING BEEN INVOLVED IN THE RECENT ASSASSINATION OF QADI ABDALLAH AL-HAJRI. AL-HAMDI ADDED THAT BEHIND THIS GROUP STANDS IRAQ WITH THE POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT ALSO OF ELEMENTS IN PDRY. AL-HAMDI ADMITTED THAT THERE WAS NO ABSOLUTE PROOF YET OF AL-AYNI-ABU LUHUM COMPLICITY BUT THE ACTIONS OF THE GROUP LEAVE LITTLE DOUBT IN THE MINDS OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

2. AL-HAMDI WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE IRAQIS CONSIDER AL-AYNI AS THEIR MAN AND WANT TO SEE HIM BACK IN POWER IN YEMEN AS A PRELUDE TO AN EVENTUAL BAATHI TAKEOVER OF YEMEN. AL-HAMDI NOTED THAT IN THIS CONNECTION ONE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT IRQ IS A ONE-PARTY STATE WITH A COMMITTED IDEOLOGY WHICH LOOKS TO THE EVENTUAL TAKEOVER OF THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD. AL-HAMDI ADDED THAT IRAQI BAATHIS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN YEMEN FOR A LONG TIME AND EVEN NOW IRONICALLY ARE PROVIDING TRAINING AND EDUCATION FOR 59 SONS OF NORTHERN TRIBAL SHAIKHS WHO HAVE GONE TO BAGHDAD WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. THIS HAS OCCURRED AT A TIME WHEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS FORBIDDEN YEMENI STUDENTS TO GO TO BAGHDAD.

3. AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT UNFORTUNATELY THE TRIBAL LEADERS IN THE NORTH ARE NOT ABLE TO TAKE A LONG TERM VIEW OF YEMEN'S CURRENT POLITICAL TROUBLES BUT ONLY WANT TO MAINTAIN THEIR LOCAL AND REGIONAL INDEPENDENCE WITH A WEAK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AS A WAY OF PROTECTING THEIR CONFIDENTIAL

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NARROW TRIBAL INTERESTS. THESE LEADERS DO NOT SEE, HOWEVER, THAT POLITICAL CHAOS WILL PLAY RIGHT INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS AS HAPPENED IN SOUTH YEMEN AND AS IS HAPPENING IN ETHIOPIA. AL-HAMDI WENT ON TO SAY IN SOUTH YEMEN, FOR EXAMPLE, THE TRIBAL LEADERS ROSE UP AGAINST QAHTAN AL-SHA'BI WHO WAS CONSIDERED A MODERATE AMONG THE NLF LEADERSHIP WHICH EMERGED AFTER IMDEPENDENCE. THE RESULT WAS THAT THE TRIBAL SHAIKHS WERE CRUSHED AND THE LEFT THEN TURNED ON THE MODERATES RESULTING IN THE OVERTHROW OF QAHTAN AL-SHA'BI AND INSTALLATION OF THE

PRESENT MARXIST REGIME. IN ETHIOPIA TOO THE CONSERVATIVES WERE UNABLE TO WORK OUT MEANINGFUL COOPERATION WITH THE MODERATES DURING THE DAYS OF HAILE SELASSIE AND THE RESULT NOW IS THAT BOTH ARE BEING PUSHED ASIDE BY THE EXTREMISTS.

4. AL-HAMDI STRESSED THAT HE HAS NO INTENTION OF CAUSING AN EXPLOSION IN YEMEN AT THE PRESENT TIME BECAUSE HE KNOWS THAT THIS IS WHAT THE EXTREMIST LEFT WANTS TO HAPPEN.

AL-HAMDI ADDED THE LATTER HOPES THAT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WILL MOVE AGAINST THE TRIBES KNOWING THAT SUCH A MOVE COULD NEVER BE KEPT A LIMITED ACTION BUT WOULD SOON DEVELOP INTO ALL-OUT WAR. (THE PRESIDENT NOTED PARENTHETICALLY THAT IN YEMEN ONCE KILLING BEGINS IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO CONTROL THE DESIRE FOR REVENGE.) AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT IF THE FIGHTING SHOULD GROW EXTREMISTS ON BOTH SIDES WOULD THEREBY BE STRENGTHENED AND IN THE END IT WOULD BE THE MODERATES TLIKE HIMSELF AND HIS COLLEAGUES WHO WOULD BE CRUSHED BETWEEN THE TWO. ONCE THE TRIBES WERE CONQUIRED, THE LEFT WOULD THEN BE FREE TO TURN ON THE MODERATES (AT THIS JUNCTURE AL-HAMDI POINTED TO HIMSELF) AND OVERTHROW THEM AS THEY DID IN THE SOUTH. AL-HAMDI EMPHASIZED THAT HE IS NOT GOING TO LET THIS HAPPEN HERE EVEN IF AL-AHMAR AND THE NORTHERN SHAIKHS ARE NOT WISE ENOUGH TO SEE WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS MIGHT WELL BE.

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5. AL-HAMDI OBSERVED THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE NOT AFRAID OF WAR NOR DOES HE PERSONALLY FEAR ALAHMAR BUT WHAT HE DOES FEAR IS THAT A STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TRIBES AT THIS TIME WOULD ONLY PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THE LEFT LED BY AL-AYNI AND THE ABU LUHUMS WHO ARE OPPROTUNISTICALLY USING AL-AHMAR FOR THEIR WON PERSONAL AND PARTY AIMS. AL-HAMDI CONCLUDED BY OBSERVING THAT AL-AHMAR THINKS HE IS CLEVERER THAN AL-AYNI AND THE ABU LUHUMS BUT UNFORTUNATELY THIS IS NOT THE CASE.

6. COMMENT: SPEAKING IN A CALM AND TYPICALLY ARTICULATE FASHION AL-HAMDI GAVE A PERCEPTIVE AND GENERALLY ACCURATE ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN YEMEN. ONE MAJOR ELEMENT MISING, HOWEVER, IS WHAT HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE PREPARED TO DO TO WEAN AL-AHMAR AWAY FROM HIS LEFTIST OPPORTUNISTIC FREINDS. THE FACT THAT HE TOLD ME IN ANOTHER CONTEXT THAT HE IS WILLING TO MEET AL-AHMAR ANY TIME, ANY PLACE TO DISCUSS THE CURRENT SITATION WOULD INDICATE A CONTINUED WILLINGNESS ON HIS PART TO FIND A MODUS VIVENDI WITH AL-AHMAR. THE LATTER, HOWEVER, SEEMS UNWILLING TO DEAL WITH AL-HAMDI AT THIS TIME. WHILE AL-HAMAR IS UNABLE TO OVERTHROW AL-HAMDI HE CAN STILL CUASE, AS AL-HAMDI SO CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SERIOUS IF NOT MORTAL HARM IN THE LONG RUN. WHAT COMES THROUGH VERY CLEARLY, THEREFORE, IN AL-HAMDI'S DISCUSSION IS HIS REALIZATION THAT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS STILL NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND THE COMBINED PRESDDURES OF THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT AND THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE, THEREFORE, TO TRY TO PROTECT THEIR FLANKS AS BEST THEY CAN WHILE STRENGTHENING

THEIR MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POSITION IN YEMEN.
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